



Higher Education & Employment Advancement Committee
Public Hearing
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Testimony
by

Sarah Chipman, J.D., Interim Associate Vice President and Title IX Coordinator
Jennifer Dineen, PhD, Associate Professor In-Residence, Program Director, Graduate Program
in Survey Research, Department of Public Policy

HB 6374, An Act Concerning Sexual Misconduct on College Campuses

Members of the Higher Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to comment on HB 6374, “An Act Concerning Sexual Misconduct on College Campuses.”

UConn recognizes the importance of incorporating student voices in the planning and execution of programming to further awareness, prevention and response efforts relating to sexual harassment, sexual assault and related interpersonal violence on our campuses. We echo the common goals of creating safe campus communities and removing barriers to reporting. We also recognize the value of obtaining information directly from our students about their experiences with the campus climate and sexual misconduct to inform this work. To that end, we offer multiple avenues for students to report concerns, including anonymously, or to simply gather information about policies, procedures and resources. Reports can be made directly to the applicable investigative offices by phone, email or using online forms; by disclosing to a faculty or staff member who will then report the disclosure to the appropriate office; by contacting UConn Police (including through their anonymous tip line); or by utilizing UConn’s anonymous Reportline. Faculty, staff and students are trained on these reporting avenues and on how to connect with resources for support and assistance. Additionally, information about reporting and resources is available on multiple University websites (for example, www.titleix.uconn.edu; www.equity.uconn.edu; www.inform.uconn.edu).

With regard to surveys, we agree that these can be a valuable tool for campuses to use on a regular basis to help assess the campus climate, the efficacy of existing infrastructure and programming, and identify any opportunities for innovation in our prevention, reporting, and response efforts. We would note, however, that in order for campuses to effectively use surveys in this way, colleges and universities should be permitted to administer surveys in the manner best suited for their students and respective campuses and aligned with the work that most institutions already are doing in this area.

Throughout their time at UConn, students are asked to participate in a multitude of surveys including multiple surveys assessing campus climate and student well-being. For example, UConn is participating in the Student Experience in the Research University (SERU) survey for both undergraduate and graduate students. The graduate survey was administered in 2019 and the

undergraduate survey is being administered in 2021, and we anticipate future participation with this survey. The survey focuses on academic and research experiences, but also includes questions relating to students' perceptions regarding support and belonging, and experiences with stereotypes and bias. Additionally, UConn frequently surveys students on topics relating to physical and mental health and wellness. For example, every other year UConn participates in the American College Health Association National College Health Assessment, a nationwide survey regarding health and wellness, which specifically includes topics about sexual health. It is important to note that most of these national survey instruments offer the ability for institutions to add customized questions. In addition to large nation-wide surveys, students also frequently participate in department or program-specific surveys for internal evaluation or accreditation.

Please know that UConn also planned to administer the Association of American Universities (AAU) Campus Climate Survey on Sexual Assault and Sexual Misconduct in the 2020-2021 Academic Year, but these plans were delayed due to the pandemic and the low number of students on campus.

Given that UConn, like many other institutions, already uses multiple avenues to gather information from our students, and recognizing that each campus has a unique student population and that the ways in which students interact with each other and with the institution can vary greatly from campus to campus, it is important that colleges and universities retain the ability to determine the best way to gather information from our students. For that reason, we are concerned that the proposed bill as written permits a council to dictate a single stand-alone survey for all campuses. We would like to suggest that a better alternative may be for the legislation to specify a limited set of data points that each institution must incorporate into a survey instrument of their choosing that is appropriate for their institution. Our neighboring state New York uses this approach within its legislation concerning campus climate assessments. New York's law lists topics that must be covered in the survey questions (such as awareness of policies and resources, prevalence of perpetration, and experiences with reporting incidents), but gives institutions flexibility in determining the best assessment questions and language to use to allow institutions to conduct surveys in a way that best serves students and in consideration of each institution's unique campus culture and policies. Incorporating this approach in Connecticut's statute would provide colleges and universities the flexibility to tailor their data collection efforts in a manner aimed at achieving the highest possible response rates and obtaining the most relevant data that will inform each institution's work toward enhancing campus safety.

We look forward to working with the Committee and the student advocates to ensure the final legislation meets our shared objective of enhancing prevention and response to sexual harassment, sexual assault and related interpersonal violence on college campuses throughout the state.

As always, we appreciate the Committee's continued support of the University of Connecticut and are happy to answer any questions.